

The Academic Booster Club also will present awards to students whose grades improve, honorable mention awards to those who came close, and awards to inspirational teachers. Additional club activities include providing volunteers for school mentoring programs and raising scholarship funds for teacher endowments.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the quality of our students' education is the key to both their future success and to America's future in the global environment. We know that we must do all we can to prepare our young people for the challenges of the 21st century and to promote academic excellence in our schools. I am proud of these efforts in my hometown, and I ask my colleagues today to join me in saluting the Rockwall Academic Booster Club and the outstanding students in Rockwall, TX, whose dedication to academic excellence deserves our recognition.

#### PRESUMPTIVE DISABILITY

### HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, September 5, 1997*

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing legislation that incorporates the Supplemental Security Income's presumptive disability system into the Social Security Disability Insurance [SSDI] program.

The Social Security Administration [SSA] is still confronted with a backlog of nearly 1 million cases waiting for disability determination. In fiscal years 1994–96, administration requested additional funds for disability investment funding in order to help SSA handle the exorbitant amount of disability claims. The administration requested \$534 million for disability investment funding as part of the regular administrative budget for fiscal year 1996. These funds were specifically earmarked for processing disability related workloads. Congress appropriated disability investment funding in the amount of \$387.5 million for fiscal year 1996. I supported these past efforts, but we must do more to help these people in their time of urgent need.

Social Security currently has over almost 1 million pending applications for disability benefits. Social Security realizes the challenge it faces in processing an overwhelming number of disability cases. It has made efforts within the past 2 years to reengineer the disability determination process. In 1995, a disability applicant had to wait an average of 5 months to get an initial decision. Today, a disability applicant can expect to wait an average of 3.5 months. I commend the Social Security Administration for their work in reducing the time a needy person must wait for a determination. However, there is still the need to deliver assistance quickly.

In recent years, Congress has heard complaints of deserving applicants waiting months before receiving desperately needed funds, and in some cases, dying before a decision is made. For example, in Arizona a disability applicant was forced to leave her secretarial job due to injuries resulting from a serious auto accident. She applied to the Social Security Administration for disability benefits to offset the loss of her income. She did not realize that she was venturing into an understaffed,

underfunded Federal program that often forces disabled people to wait months to learn whether they qualify for benefits. After a year wait, she was successful in obtaining the benefits to which she was entitled only after hiring an attorney who specialized in such cases. These kinds of long delays are repeated in anecdote after anecdote.

The SSI Program makes an initial determination that presumes a person to be disabled if they fit certain severe disability criteria. These people begin to receive SSI benefits immediately and the SSA then has a 6-month period to make the final determination of eligibility using the SSA's definition of disability.

Being able to receive SSI benefits on the basis of a presumptive disability determination provides the disabled person with much needed money immediately. However, for a worker who has paid into Social Security and becomes disabled, there is no comparable process to identify the people that would most likely qualify for DI benefits. My legislation would remedy this problem by providing for determinations of presumptive disability under Title II of the Social Security Act in the same manner and to the same extent as is currently applicable under title XVI of such act.

This means that if a person is found to be presumptively disabled under title II and meets the requirements for entitlement benefits, the person will begin to receive benefits, after the initial 5 month waiting period required before DI benefits can be paid, for up to 6 months while the final determination is being made. If the person is presumed eligible to receive DI benefits, then their dependents shall also begin to receive benefits.

If however, in the final determination, a claimant's impairment does not meet SSA's definition of disability, they and their dependents shall not be responsible for returning the money they received during the presumptive eligibility determination period.

In some instances, a person may be presumed eligible for SSI benefits before being found to be presumptively disabled under title II. In this case, the person will still be entitled to only 6 months of presumptive disability benefits. In most States, while receiving SSI benefits, a person is eligible for Medicaid. Under this proposal, claimants who would have been eligible for SSI benefits, were it not for their receipt of DI presumptive disability benefits, would be deemed eligible for SSI, making them eligible for Medicaid in those States where SSI eligibility triggers Medicaid eligibility. When the final determination for DI benefits is made, the claimant loses the Medicaid eligibility. Medicare will be provided to disabled workers and their dependents after they have been receiving disability benefits for 24 months, including the time they were receiving presumptive disability payments.

#### IN MEMORIAM OF MELINE KASPARIAN

### HON. JOSEPH P. KENNEDY II

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, September 5, 1997*

Mr. KENNEDY of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a wonderful woman who dedicated her life to edu-

cating children in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Ms. Meline Kasparian, president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, former member of the Amherst Town Meeting, past president of the Springfield Education Association, and teacher of literature, writing, and drama in Springfield for 25 years was lost to the people of Massachusetts during the recent August recess. Though she spent 2 years battling cancer, her death was nonetheless sudden and shocking to us all.

Meline strove to ensure educational opportunities for all students, without regard to their socio-economic background. She had a profound belief in the public school system. She knew that for thousands of children it was their best opportunity to succeed in life and she was determined to make sure that they were given the best education possible.

Meline spearheaded reforms in her own school system—initiating the Team Approach to Better Schools in Springfield. She was also a vocal advocate during the legislative battle for the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, which is today helping to improve the standards in every public school across the State.

As the representative for the teachers, Meline also showed an enormous amount of strength. She fought for better working conditions for teachers—knowing that those were the same conditions that our children are learning in. Meline knew that we need to invest more in our public schools in order for our children to succeed.

During my tenure in the House of Representatives I had the opportunity and privilege to work with Meline. Her unwavering devotion to improving public education never ceased to impress me. I will always remember Meline as a tireless advocate for public education. Her energy and drive will be sorely missed in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

#### SUPPORT MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON H.R. 1119

### HON. JAMES A. TRAFICANT, JR.

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, September 5, 1997*

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, last night the House debated a motion I offered to instruct House conferees on H.R. 1119, the fiscal year 1998 Defense authorization bill, to retain the amendment I had passed to the bill authorizing the use of United States troops on our border with Mexico. I urge all Members to support this motion and support this important provision. I would like to share with Members some compelling reasons to support the Traficant amendment.

The Traficant amendment authorizes the Secretary of Defense—at the expressed request of the Attorney General and/or the Secretary of the Treasury—to redeploy up to 10,000 U.S. troops to assist the Border Patrol, the INS, or the Customs Service in preventing illegal aliens, drug traffickers, terrorists, and narcotics from entering the United States. The Traficant amendment merely gives the Pentagon the authority to transfer troops—it does not require them to do anything. The transfer of troops could only be made if the Attorney General or Treasury Secretary requests such assistance.